

Questions and Answers

Q: Lactose intolerance or milk allergy? If my child or a student is lactose intolerant or has a milk allergy, what foods should he/she eat?

A: Many times people confuse milk allergy with lactose intolerance. Some parents may state their child has a milk allergy, when it may actually be lactose intolerance. A **milk allergy** refers to an allergic reaction to the protein in milk. People with milk allergies must avoid all milk products.

Lactose intolerance, however, refers to a deficiency of the enzyme called lactase. Lactase is needed by the body to digest lactose, the sugar found in milk. People with lactose intolerance can use some dairy products that are low in lactose. Some symptoms of lactose intolerance include nausea, stomach cramps and bloating, pain, gas, and diarrhea. These symptoms may occur within thirty minutes after eating the dairy product or several hours later, as the undigested lactose passes along the intestines.

Dairy products are an important source of nutrients such as protein, calcium, riboflavin, and vitamins A and D. It is important to plan menus carefully for a lactose intolerant person or a person with a milk allergy so that nutrient deficiencies don't occur.

Use non-dairy protein-rich foods such as meat, chicken or turkey, fish, eggs, and dry beans and peas. Milk substitutes and low lactose milk products are great alternatives to regular milk. Some people may even be able to eat yogurt. Consider including low lactose cheeses and high calcium vegetables on the menu. Soy infant formulas and soymilk are available for young children and adults who can't drink cow's milk. It is important to read labels carefully. "Nondairy" foods may still contain lactose. Words on an ingredient list that may indicate lactose include milk solids, whey, margarine, sweet or sour cream, buttermilk, or malted milk. Food products that often contain lactose include bread, cookies, cream soups, dry cereal, processed foods, sugar substitutes, and chocolate drink mixes.

For more information contact your local registered dietitian or visit the American Dietetic Association's website at www.eatright.org.

Information provided by Judy Dzimiera, M.Ed., Nutrition Education and Training Specialist, Tennessee Project Director 2001-2003. Changing the Scene: Healthy School Nutrition Environment, Nutrition and Transportation Services Branch, Maryland State Department of Education Nutrition Connection, Winter, 2001-2002.